

## Pragmatic comprehension of apology, request and refusal: An investigation on the effect of consciousness-raising video-driven prompts

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### *Abstract*

Recent research in interlanguage pragmatics (ILP) has substantiated that some aspects of pragmatics are amenable to instruction in the second or foreign language classroom. However, there are still controversies over the most conducive teaching approaches and the required materials. Therefore, this study aims to investigate the relative effectiveness of consciousness-raising video-driven prompts on the comprehension of the three speech acts of apology, request, and refusal on seventy eight (36 male and 42 female) upper-intermediate Persian learners of English who were randomly assigned to four groups (metapragmatic, form-search, role play, and control). The four groups were exposed to 45 video vignettes (15 for each speech act) extracted from different episodes of Flash Forward, Stargate TV Series and Annie Hall Film for nine 60-minute sessions of instruction twice a week. Results of the multiple choice discourse completion test (MDCT) indicated that learners' awareness of apologies, requests and refusals benefit from all three types of instruction, but the results of the Post hoc test of Tukey (HSD) illustrated that the metapragmatic group outperformed the other treatment groups, and that form-search group had a better performance than role-play and control groups.

**Keywords:** pragmalinguistic knowledge, sociopragmatic knowledge, consciousness-raising, EFL

### **Introduction**

Interlanguage pragmatics (ILP) has attained a considerable attention from researchers and practitioners, and it is still a burgeoning area in second language acquisition. Kasper and Dahl (1991) define the discipline of ILP as the study of non-native speakers' acquisition, comprehension and production of pragmatics. Within ILP development, nevertheless, the pendulum has swung much towards production-oriented studies (Rose, 2009) and *comprehension* is "the least well-represented, with only a handful of studies done to date" (Kasper & Rose, 2002, p.118). Moreover, although it is widely accepted that instruction plays a crucial role in the

acquisition of pragmatics (Alcón- Soler, & Martí'nez-Flor, 2005; Jeon & Kaya, 2006; Kasper, 1997; Kasper & Roever, 2002; Kasper & Schmidt, 1996; Kondo, 2008; Lyster, 1993, 1994; Rose, 2005; Rose & Kasper, 2001; Taguchi, 2007, 2008), the foreign language classroom may expose students to a limited environment to foster pragmatics learning. There is consensus among pragmatics practitioners and theoreticians that the opportunities for human interaction are rather restricted (Kasper, 2001; Kasper & Rose, 1999; Lyster, 1994), and the materials to which students are exposed are decontextualized (Bardovi-Harlig, Hartford, Mahan-Taylor,

Morgan, & Reynolds, 1991). Alternatively, some researchers propound that textbook conversations are rather limited and unreliable sources of input to tap on pragmatics learning (Bardovi-Harlig *et al.*, 1991; Boxer & Pickering, 1995; Gilmore, 2004; Loörscher & Schulze, 1988). Moreover, Rose (1999) states that large classes, limited contact hours, and little opportunity for intercultural communication are some of the features of the English as a foreign language (EFL) context that impede pragmatic learning.

Consequently, the use of authentic audiovisual input and the role of instruction have drawn scholars' attention in research on ILP. The bodies of research conducted by Washburn (2001), Alcon (2005) were legitimized by the fact that both sociopragmatic and pragmalinguistic awareness are especially difficult for EFL learners. Given that, they claim that authentic audiovisual input caters for a welter of opportunities to address all aspects of language use in a whole array of contexts, and regarding the fact that most studies to date have focused on pragmatics *production* through dichotomous teaching approaches and responding to Kasper and Rose's (2002) claim that studies on pragmatics comprehension are the most under-researched area (Kasper & Rose, 2002); it is, therefore, hypothesized that video-driven vignettes may be useful to expose learners to the pragmatic aspects of the target language to not only address pragmatics *comprehension* but also to compensate for the inadequacy of textbooks, limited contact hours, and classroom conversations.

### **Background**

Following Leech's (1983) demarcation, pragmatic competence is divided into *sociopragmatic* and *pragmalinguistic* competence. The former encompasses

knowledge of the relationship between communicative action and power, social distance, and the imposition associated with the past and future (Brown & Levinson, as cited in Kasper & Rover, 2005, p. 317), knowledge of mutual rights and obligations, taboos, and conventional practices (Thomas, 1983), and the social conditions and consequences of "what you do, when and to whom" (Fraser, Rintal & Walters, as cited in Kasper & Rover 2005, p. 317).

The latter, on the other hand, comprises the knowledge and ability to use conventions of means (such as strategies to realize speech acts) and conventions of form (such as the linguistic forms implementing speech act strategies) (Clark, as cited in Kasper & Rover, 2005, p. 317; Thomas, 1983). The present study aimed at developing learners' sociopragmatic and pragmalinguistic competence by focusing on issues such as power, social distance, and the imposition as well as strategies and forms of apologies, requests, and refusals.

### *The rationale behind this study*

Two of the most influential cognitive processing approaches proposed in second language acquisition (SLA) are Sharwood Smith's Consciousness-Raising (CR) and Schmidt's Noticing Hypothesis (Schmidt, 1993, 2001; Sharwood Smith, 1980, 1993). Sharwood Smith (1980) conceptualizes that the term "consciousness-raising" represents a deliberate focus on the formal properties of language with a respect toward enhancing the development of second language knowledge. Sharwood Smith (1993) argues that "CR implies that the learner's mental state is altered by the input; hence, all input is intake" (p. 176). Given that CR plays a crucial role in enhancing properties of language, Rose (1994) introduces video-prompts as an approach to promote pragmatic consciousness-raising since they

can provide the fundamental aspects of pragmatics which can be capitalized upon by teachers of both native and non-native speakers.

In line with Sharwood Smith, Schmidt (1993, 2001) contends that the noticing hypothesis is primarily concerned with the initial phase of input processing and the attentional requirements for input to become intake. Schmidt (2001) postulates that any target L2 feature needs to be noticed by the learner for learning to occur: “while there is subliminal perception, there is no subliminal learning” (p. 26). Because more attention results in more learning, “attention must be directed to whatever evidence is relevant for a particular learning domain, i.e. that attention must be specifically focused and not just global” (Schmidt, 2001, p. 30).

He then extended his hypothesis to pragmatics postulating that, “in order to acquire pragmatics, one must attend to both the linguistic form of utterances and the relevant social and contextual features with which they are associated” (Schmidt, 2001). He also mentions that “pragmatic knowledge seems to be partly conscious, and partly accessible to consciousness, although it cannot be the case that all pragmatic knowledge is accessible to consciousness” (Schmidt, 1993, p. 23).

Being motivated by these cognitive-psychological theories, Eslami-Rasekh, Eslami-Rasekh, and Fatahi<sup>1</sup> (2004), for example, carried out a study to explore the effect of explicit metapragmatic instruction on the comprehension of speech acts of request, apology, and complaint on Iranian advanced EFL students. Teacher-fronted

discussions, cooperative grouping, role plays, and other pragmatically oriented tasks were used to promote the learning of the intended speech acts. A pretest-posttest control group design was used. The participants were senior Iranian undergraduates majoring in TEFL (Teaching English as a Foreign Language). A group of American students were used to provide the baseline for the study.

A multiple choice pragmatic comprehension test was developed in several stages and used both as a pretest and posttest to measure the effect of instruction on the pragmatic comprehension of the students. The results of the data analysis revealed that students' comprehension of speech act improved significantly and that pragmatic competence is not impervious to instruction even in EFL settings.

#### *Video-driven prompts as influential sources of input*

As a consequence of the constraints and challenges involved in dealing with teaching sociopragmatic and pragmalinguistic features in the foreign language context mentioned above, the use of authentic audiovisual and video enhanced materials and the role of instruction have gained considerable attention in the development of pragmatics. Analogous to other areas of language learning, Alcón-Soler (2005) contends that learners could be exposed to pragmatic input through classroom interaction, textbook conversations and films. Loßcher and Schulze (1988) point out that in EFL contexts the range of speech acts and realization strategies is marginalized, and that the typical interaction patterns, i.e. initiation, response, and feedback (IRF) impose inherent limitations on pragmatic input and opportunities for practicing discourse organization strategies. Alternatively, Crandall and Basturkmen

<sup>1</sup> For more information on Persian studies on Pragmatics, see, for example, Abdolrezaipoor & Eslami Rasekh (2012) and Parvaresh & Eslami Rasekh, (2009).

(2004) stipulate that textbook conversations do not cater sufficient pragmatic input. In a similar vein, a solid body of research findings documents that textbook conversations are not a reliable source of pragmatic input (Bardovi-Harlig *et al.*, 1991; Boxer & Pickering, 1995; Gilmore, 2004). Rose (1994) observes that videotaped discourse contains “rich recoverable contexts which can be exploited in consciousness-raising activities” (p. 58).

Moreover, Alcón-Soler (2005) investigates the efficacy of explicit versus implicit instruction on the ability to use request strategies. One hundred and thirty-two students were randomly assigned to three groups (explicit, implicit and control). The three groups were exposed to excerpts including requests extracted from different episodes of the *Stargate* TV series. However, while the explicit group received instruction by means of direct awareness-raising tasks and written metapragmatic feedback on the use of appropriate requests, the implicit group was provided with typographical enhancement of request strategies and a set of implicit awareness-raising tasks. Results of the study demonstrate that learners’ awareness of requests benefit from both explicit and implicit instruction. However, in line with previous research, this study illustrates that, although an improvement in learners’ appropriate use of requests took place after the instructional period, the explicit group showed an advantage over the implicit one.

Takahashi (2005) investigates the effects of instruction on L2 pragmatics development by exploring the manner in which Japanese EFL learners notice target English request forms through a form-comparison (FC) condition and a form-search (FS) condition. Participants in the FC group compare their request forms with those provided by native

English speakers and then describe any feature of native-speaker request realization, and learners in the FS group point out any “native-like usage” in the input containing the targets. To this end, 49 Japanese college students who were freshmen or sophomores were divided into two general English classes: 25 students in FC and 24 students in FS. The results indicate that during the treatment, the learners in the form-comparison condition noticed the target request forms to a greater extent than those in the form-search condition. Further, the learners’ higher awareness of the target forms tended to ensure the emergence of these forms during their post- test performance.

Bardovi-Harlig and Griffin (2005) sought to examine the relative effectiveness of pragmatic awareness activity in an ESL context. For doing so, they selected five high intermediate intact ESL classes consisting of 43 students from 18 language backgrounds. The learners were asked to work in pairs to identify the source of pragmatic infelicities in video-taped scenarios and to frequently perform role-plays to remedy the addressed infelicities. The main objective of the role-plays was to determine the types of pragmatic infelicities that are recognized and repaired by learners. Results of the role-plays indicated that learners noticed and completed missing speech acts, and semantic formulas, although pragmatic improvements in terms of form and content of repairs were not target-like. To put it precisely, learners were able to supply the missing apology for arriving late or explanations for making requests or for not having done a class assignment on time, but the form or content were not culturally or linguistically transparent. They conclude that learners generally know what to change, whether speech act, formula, form, or content, but how to change it in the area of

form or content seemed to be more challenging.

With the recognition of the role of pragmatic competence in communicative competence, substantial bodies of second language (L2) research have scrutinized learners' pragmatic performance in EFL/ESL communicative contexts. In the existing L2 literature, pragmatic competence has been explored primarily from production skills, specifically production of speech acts (Kasper & Roever, 2002; Rose, 2009; Taguchi, 2013). Little L2 research has investigated comprehension of pragmatic functions (Kasper & Rose, 2002). A relatively small number of L2 studies have examined whether learners can comprehend implied meaning accurately (Garcia, 2004; Taguchi, 2002, 2005, 2008). Most studies conducted on pragmatic comprehension are confined to learners' accuracy and comprehension (Taguchi, 2007). Another underrepresented area in the previous research is that most studies on pragmatic comprehension have drawn on written input to sensitize pragmatic awareness (Kondo, 2008), and only a few studies to date have utilized video-vignettes as an input source to develop pragmatic comprehension (Alcón-Soler, 2005; Rose, 1994).

Another gap in the existing literature pertains to teaching methods or class activities, Kasper (1997) points out that teachers can utilize activities through one of the inductive, deductive, implicit or explicit approaches to instruction or through an informed eclectic approach. Regarding this, most studies to date have focused on dichotomous teaching approaches, and what is not examined systematically relates to the implementation of informed eclectic approach. Following DeCoo (1996), in our instructional approach we did not make a dichotomous division between 'explicit' and

'implicit', nor did we draw on 'deductive' and 'inductive' instruction. Rather our approach to intervention was a mixture of complementary approaches and purposeful class activities, that is, informed eclecticism, in the form of peer work, form-search, metapragmatic awareness, and role-plays. As to the many types of teaching approaches, the present study drew on metapragmatic consciousness-raising tasks, form-search, and role play as the three interventional approaches.

Given that the video medium as a teaching and learning tool has some distinct advantages over naturalistic observations and textbooks (Alcón-Soler, 2002; Garza, 1996; Grant & Starks, 2001; Koike, 1995; Lonergan, 1984; Martí'nez-Flor, 2007; Rose, 1994; Stempleski & Tomalin, 1990; Swaffar & Vlatten, 1997), and regarding the fact that, to our knowledge, few studies have empirically scrutinized the effectiveness of video prompts on the development of speech acts, it makes sense to bridge the gap by conducting a study on the effectiveness of consciousness-raising video-driven prompts on the development of three speech acts of apology, request, and refusal in a foreign language classroom.

### **Research questions**

In order to bridge the gap in the existing literature on ILP and in order to investigate the possible contributions of a different kind of input, video vignettes in the context of classroom-based instruction to the development of L2 pragmatic competence, this study aimed to investigate the effectiveness of consciousness-raising video-driven prompts on the development of three speech acts of apology, request, and refusal. The study addressed two main questions:

1. Do *metapragmatic consciousness-raising approach*, *form-search approach*, and *role-play approach* enhance learners' comprehension of speech acts of apology, request, and refusal?
2. Is there any difference in learners' pragmatic comprehension of apology, request, and refusal across the three kinds of consciousness-raising intervention- *metapragmatic*, *form-search*, and *role-play*?

## Methodology

### *Participants*

Seventy eight Iranian EFL learners (36 male and 42 female) studying English at an English Language Institute participated in this study. The results of the pilot study substantiated that the upper-intermediate EFL learners are appropriate for the present study; therefore, four groups of upper-intermediate EFL learners ranging in age from 16 to 26 were divided into metapragmatic group, form-search group, role-play group, and control group. The metapragmatic group consisted of 22 learners (10 male and 12 female) ranging in age from 17 to 23 (average age 18.45). The form-search group consisted of 21 learners (11 male and 10 female) ranging in age from 16 to 22 (average age 18.71). The role-play group had 18 learners (8 male and 10 female) ranging in age from 16 to 26 (average age 18.05), and the control group consisted of 17 learners (7 male and 10 female) ranging in age from 17 to 26 (average age 18.67). None of the participants had any living experiences in English speaking countries.

### *Test instruments: test of listening pragmatic comprehension of apology, request, & refusal*

Bachman and Palmer (1996) conceptualize that for any given test to be useful, it must

be developed with specific purpose, a particular group of test takers and a specific language use domain or target language use (TLU). One of the components of test usefulness, Bachman and Palmer (1996) believe, is authenticity which is characterized as "the degree of correspondence of the characteristics of a given language test task to the features of a TLU task" (Bachman & Palmer, 1996, p. 23).

As part of a PhD dissertation, the research instrument was piloted on the basis of the insights and feedback gained from the Pragmatic Assessment Rubrics demonstrated below. It contained 25 conversations extracted from Interchange Series, Top Notch Series, American English File Series, and Touchstone Series. There were 8 conversations featuring speech act of apology, 8 conversations featuring speech act of request, and 9 conversations featuring speech act of refusal which were followed by one practice conversation to familiarize the test takers with the peculiarities of the test. Each conversation had 8 questions three of which tapping upon metapragmatic ability, one of which measuring sociopragmatic ability, three other questions measuring pragmalinguistic ability, and last but not least question, i.e., question 8 measured the comprehension of the speech act which was subsumed under pragmalinguistic and sociopragmatic ability. For more information see appendix A. Students just listen to the conversation. They do not see the audio scrip.

A fundamental consideration of teacher-based assessment stipulates that the choice of criteria in the evaluation rubric aligns with the instructional goals in a consistent manner (Brown, 2004). Therefore, the present study took into account the Pragmatic Assessment Rubrics

encompassing three constructs which are as follows:

- a. Linguistic aspects (pragmalinguistic ability);
- b. Cultural aspects (sociopragmatic ability); and
- c. Analytic aspects (ability to analyze and evaluate pragmatic use-referred to as metapragmatic ability, Ishihara, 2010).

From the pragmalinguistic perspective, and bearing authenticity in mind, the present study drew upon vocabulary and phrases, strategies for a speech act, and choice and use of pragmatic tone (Ishihara, 2010, p. 293). With regard to sociopragmatic competence, this study embarked upon the level of formality and politeness (Ishihara, 2010, p. 295). Besides evaluating linguistic and cultural aspects of learners' pragmatics, it is also possible to assess learners' ability to analyze the pragmatics of the L2. Such metapragmatic information can include contextual information analyzed in terms of social status, social and psychological distance, and degree of imposition (Ishihara, 2010, p.295).

#### *Scoring System and Reliability*

Since just one answer was regarded as the correct answer, correct responses and incorrect ones were assigned 1 and 0, respectively. To determine the reliability index of binary variables KR20 formula was employed which is a special case of Cronbach's Alpha. The internal consistency and reliability of the pragmatic rating rubric used in the present study to assess the responses of the participants on the listening pragmatic comprehension of apology, request, and refusal was obviously an important area of concern in reviewing the study results. The results of the calculations of the coefficient alpha for internal consistency indicated acceptable level for

the DCT ( $\alpha = .82$ ). The reliability level calculated for these results were above the 0.7 threshold considered acceptable in social science research (Vogt, 2005).

#### *Instructional treatment materials*

Forty-five video vignettes 15 apologies, 15 requests, and 15 apologies were extracted from different episodes of *Flash Forward*, *Stargate TV* series and *Annie Hall* film. Alcón-Soler (2005) takes advantage of *Stargate TV* series working on the identification and analysis of direct and indirect requests. Following Rose (1999), *Annie Hall* film was opted because it could provide the students with the analysis of language forms and strategies of requests and apologies as well as good discussions on the appropriateness of forms in relation to the contexts. The number of video prompts for each speech act was 15 covering various situations such as work, school, home, hospital, prison, restaurant, and store, to name just a few. The excerpts encompass direct requests (*Annie, tell Dr. Flicker; Stop it, Annie*), conventionally indirect (*Annie, would you like a lift?*), and non-conventionally indirect requests (*I have a car; Annie's friend talking to him at the gym*).

The vignettes also included different strategies of apologies such as an expression of apology (*I'm really sorry.*), acknowledgment of responsibility (*It was all my fault.*), an explanation or account (*I got stuck in the traffic.*), an offer of repair (*How can I make it up to you? Can I buy you lunch on Friday?*), and a promise of non-recurrence (*I'll make sure to turn the volume down.*) (Cohen & Olshtain, 1981, pp. 119-125).

#### *Procedure*

The appropriate design of the present study was a pre-test post-test control group one.

The control group's performance was an indicator to see how the other three groups became aware of the sociopragmatic and pragmalinguistic features. The three groups, except the control group which received a normal conversational treatment, were exposed to vignettes extracted from different episodes of *Flash Forward*, and *Stargate TV Series* and *Annie Hall Film*. The major objective of these vignettes was to make students aware of the sociopragmatic and pragmalinguistic aspects involved in making apologies, requests, and refusals. Each group received 45 video excerpts, 15 apologies, 15 requests, and 15 refusals nine 60-minute sessions of instruction on the video prompts twice a week. The treatment that each group received is explicated separately as follows:

*Form Search Group (FSG)*: The form search group consisted of 21 learners (11 male and 10 female) ranging in age from 16 to 22. Following Takahashi (2005), in this group any "native-like usage" in the input containing the target language forms was highlighted. We drew on vocabulary and phrases (e.g., a *big favor*, I *just need* . . .), grammatical structures (e.g. *Can you* . . . / *Would you* . . . / *I was wondering if* . . . / *Would it be possible* . . . ?), strategies for a speech act (i.e., the selection of formulas and the way they are used) (e.g., *giving a reason for a request*, *apologizing for the trouble*, ), and choice and use of pragmatic tone (e.g., how sincere the speaker appears with verbal and non-verbal cues).

*The Metapragmatic Awareness Raising Group (MPG)*: The participants in this group were 22 learners (10 male and 12 female) ranging in age from 17 to 23. The pragmalinguistic and sociolinguistic features were explicitly highlighted. To this end, the researchers followed a four-step procedure adopted from Asadifar (2010):

1. Developing learners' understanding of the importance of pragmatics by presenting the key elements of pragmalinguistics and sociopragmatics;
2. Raising learners' awareness of the appropriate use of L1 requests, apologies, and refusals;
3. Providing explicit information on the pragmalinguistic forms of L2 requests, apologies, and refusals;
4. Discussing the appropriate use of L2 requests, apologies, and refusals, e.g., issues of social distance, power and imposition, the speaker's intention, etc.

*The Role-Play Group (RPG)*: The role-play group had 18 learners (8 male and 10 female) ranging in age from 16 to 26. They were allowed to take notes as they were watching the episodes, and then played roles like the native models. Students were also provided with the scripts. They acted out different patterns and ways of making requests, apologies, and refusals in different situations both formally and informally. Moreover, they worked on the role relationships between the interlocutors, the distance between them, and the degree of imposition. Like the other groups, different strategies for making requests, apologies, and refusals were acted out from direct request and refusal strategies to non-conventionally indirect request and refusal strategies and from simple apologies to a promise of non-occurrence.

Like the other groups, from the pragmalinguistic vantage point, specific dimensions of language were acted out including the choice and use of vocabulary and phrases (e.g., a *big favor*), grammatical structures (e.g. *I was wondering if*.....), strategies for a speech act (i.e., *the selection of formulas and the way they are used* (e.g., *giving a reason for request*, *apologizing for*

*trouble*), choice and use of pragmatic tone, and choice and use of discourse markers (e.g., *by the way, well,.....*). Role-plays are possible to simulate conversational turns and to get the interlocutor to use conversational pressures that are not present in a DCT (Cohen & Olshtain, 1994), but they are generally time-consuming and require interlocutor training if they want to be utilized as a means of assessment, but in the present study role-plays were used as an interventional means to practice the dialogs which is a common practice in almost all conversational classes.

*The control group (CG):* The control group consisted of 17 learners (7 male and 10 female) ranging in age from 17 to 26. The control group did not receive any instruction on the use of speech acts. The presentation of the video vignettes was followed by comprehension questions, repetition, and vocabulary focus. The pragmalinguistic and sociolinguistic features were not brought to the fore.

#### *Data analysis*

In order to determine if any pragmatic development occurred between the pre-test and the post-test, *t-test* for *repeated measure data* was used. In order to measure inter-group differences and development one-way between groups *ANOVA* and the post hoc test of *Tukey (HSD)* were used.

### **Results**

Research Question One: Do *metapragmatic consciousness-raising approach, form-search approach, and role-play approach* enhance learners' comprehension of speech acts of apology, request, and refusal?

In order to investigate the significance of the difference in each group, a paired samples *t-test* had to be used. Table 1 shows the difference in learners' comprehension of the

three speech acts of apology, request, and refusal across the four groups before and after the treatment. The descriptive statistics reveal that the four groups were homogenous in terms of their sociopragmatic and pragmalinguistic knowledge in pre-intervention stage. Moreover, as can be seen in this table, the total mean (107.04) of the four groups in the post-test was higher than that (81.23) of the four groups in the pre-test, showing that the instruction has had an effect on the learners' pragmatic development. As presented in Table 2, *t-test* ( $t = -.671$ ,  $df = 16$ ,  $\alpha = 0.05$ ,  $p = .512$ ) analysis of results did not report any statistical difference in the control group before and after the interventional period because *p* value was more than  $\alpha$ .

However, there were differences in the treatment groups. Table 1 shows, for instance, that the metapragmatic group (MPG) obtained a mean of 129.09 with its standard deviation of 16.900 on the post test. Likewise, as it can be seen in Table 2, the *t* value (-19.082) denotes statistically significant differences that point to a  $p = 0.000$  level of probability for the metapragmatic group. Correspondingly, the difference regarding learners' awareness in the form-search group (FSG) before and after the treatment is statistically significant. As shown in Table 2, the *t* value (-14.446) and the probability level ( $p = 0.000$ ) reveal statistically significant differences in the form-search group. Moreover, as Table 2 indicates, the results from the comparison of the means of the role-play group (RPG) showed there was a significant difference between the means of the two groups ( $t = -7.032$ ,  $df = 17$ ,  $\alpha = 0.05$ ,  $p = .000$ ). Because *p* value was less than  $\alpha$ , there was a significant difference between the means of the role-play group before and after the treatment. Based on the analysis of the pretest and post test results, it is therefore concluded that

learners' comprehension of speech acts of apology, request, and refusal across the three teaching approaches—metapragmatic, form-search, and role-play - enhanced after the intervention.

**Table 1: Summary of descriptive statistics of all groups before and after the instructional period**

Group	Test	T	df	Sig
MPG	Pre-test	-19.082	21	.000
	Post-test			
FSG	Pre-test	-14.446	20	.000
	Post-test			
RPG	Pre-test	-7.032	17	.000
	Post-test			
CG	Pre-test	-.671	16	.512
	Post-test			
Total	Pre-test	-11.583	77	.000
	Post-test			

Research Question Two: Is there any difference in learners' pragmatic comprehension of apology, request, and refusal across the three kinds of consciousness-raising intervention—metapragmatic, form-search, and role-play?

**Table 2: Summary of paired samples t- test of all groups before and after the instructional period**

Group	Test	N	M	SD
MPG	Pre-test	22	81.77	12.735
	Post-test		129.09	16.900
FSG	Pre-test	21	80.67	22.105
	Post-test		113.24	20.349
RPG	Pre-test	18	80.50	17.942
	Post-test		96.78	18.988
CG	Pre-test	17	82	18.368
	Post-test		83.35	18.313
Total	Pre-test	78	81.23	17.684
	Post-test		107.04	25.149

The effect of the four kinds of interventional treatments on developing pragmatic comprehension in apologies, requests, and refusals was measured by analyzing learners' awareness of these speech acts in the post-test. Regarding the learners' awareness on the post-test and seeking the answer to the second research question, we compared the four groups simultaneously to see if there were any meaningful differences among them. Therefore, a one-way repeated measures ANOVA statistical test was applied. As seen in Table 3, the amount of variability between groups (SS between groups= 17997.954) is different from the amount of variability within the groups (SS within groups= 25775.758), which indicates that there is some difference in the groups. Moreover, the *F* ratio (with three degrees of freedom) is larger than the observed value of

$F$  (21.900), which means that significant group differences were observed with regard to performance of the four groups. The ANOVA table shows just the fact that there is a meaningful difference, but it does not tell us where the differences exactly are. Therefore, in order to pinpoint exactly where the differences lie we resort to a post hoc test of Tukey (HSD).

**Table 3: ANOVA for learners' Development of requests, apologies, and refusals in the post-test**

	SS	Df	MS	$F$	$P$
Between Groups	22884.704	3	7628.235	21.900	<b>0.000</b>
Within Groups	25775.758	74	348.321		
Total	48660.462	77			

The post-hoc Tukey (HSD) tests reveal that the participants of metapragmatic, form-search, and role-play groups significantly outperformed the control. It also shows that there is a meaningful difference between metapragmatic group, form-search group ( $p = .034$ ), role-play group ( $p = .000$ ) and control group ( $p = .000$ ). Moreover, the mean differences between metapragmatic group, and form-search group, and role-play group are 15.807, and 32.268, respectively indicating that metapragmatic group outperforms the other groups. Correspondingly, as it can be seen in the same table, there is a meaningful difference between form-search and role-play group ( $p = .037$ ), and form-search outperforms role-play group as indicated in the mean difference between the two groups (16.46). It is, however, interesting to note that no meaningful difference is found between role-play group and control group which holds a level of significance of (.154).

**Table 4: Multiple comparisons through post hoc test of Tukey (HSD)**

(I) Intervention	(J) Intervention	Mean Difference (I-J)	Std. Error	Sig.
MPG	FSG	15.807*	5.694	<b>.034</b>
	RPG	32.268*	5.932	<b>.000</b>
	CG	45.693*	6.027	<b>.000</b>
FSG	MPG	-15.807*	5.694	<b>.034</b>
	RPG	16.460*	5.995	<b>.037</b>
	CG	29.885*	6.089	<b>.000</b>
RPG	MPG	-32.268*	5.932	<b>.000</b>
	FSG	-16.460*	5.995	<b>.037</b>
	CG	13.425	6.312	.154
CG	MPG	-45.693*	6.027	<b>.000</b>
	FSG	-29.885*	6.089	<b>.000</b>
	RPG	-13.425	6.312	.154

\*. The mean difference is significant at the 0.05 level.

## Discussion

This study revealed improvement of pragmatic ability among EFL learners over a nine 60-minute sessions of instruction on the video prompts twice a week in terms of making direct requests and refusals, conventionally indirect, and non-conventionally indirect requests and refusals, and in terms of apologizing such as an expression of apology, acknowledgment of responsibility, an explanation or account, an offer of repair, and promise of non-recurrence.

The first research question addressed the effectiveness of different instructional approaches on the comprehension of apology, request, and refusal, and the second research question sought to answer which group could possibly lead to more

awareness. Although the results of the study revealed that all three treatment groups significantly improved their comprehension of the three speech acts after the interventional period, the metapragmatic group outperformed form-search, role-play, and control groups. Moreover, it was found that form-search group had a better performance than role-play group and control group. The findings of this study confirm previous research on the positive effect of instruction on learners' development of pragmatics (Alcón-Soler, 2005; Alcón-Soler, & Martínez-Flor, 2005; Bardovi-Harlig, 2001; Jernigan, 2012; Kasper & Roeber, 2002; Olshtain & Cohen, 1990; Rose, 2005; Rose & Kasper, 2001; Taguchi, 2005, 2008, 2013).

Rose and Kasper (2001) call for a need to make a link between interlanguage pragmatic research and second language acquisition theories. Taking into consideration the learners' pragmatic gain, our data lend support to Schmidt's (1993) noticing hypothesis and Sharwood Smith's (1980) consciousness-raising since instruction has played a crucial role in making learners aware of a number of extra-linguistic contextual factors such as social status, distance, and imposition. The results are supportive of the fact that learning in a foreign language context does not necessarily disadvantage pragmatic development (Ohta, as cited in Taguchi, 2007, p. 328). As Taguchi (2007) puts it, pragmatic learning is dependent on the way learning is organized and presented that fosters or hinders pragmatic development. In line with postulations posited by Rose (1994), Garza (1996), Grant and Starks (2001) on the potential advantages of video-prompts as authentic sources of input, the results of the present study prove that video-vignettes can be utilized by EFL teachers to

sensitize learners to sociopragmatic and pragmalinguistic features.

As a measure to overcome the discourse-structural restrictions of the IRF and the asymmetrical power relations between teacher and students that IRF produces, peer activities have become a regular instructional practice. Peer interactions among foreign language students in task-structured activities and role-plays have proven to offer substantially productive environments for fostering L2 pragmatic and interactional competence (Tateyama, as cited in Tateyama & Kasper, 2008, p. 45). Regarding this, Bardovi-Harlig and Griffin (2005) utilized role-plays as an interventional method to determine the types of pragmatic infelicities that are recognized and repaired by learners. Results of the role-plays indicated that learners noticed and completed missing speech acts, and semantic formulas.

The results of the present study, on the one hand, are supported by Bardovi-Harlig and Griffin' (2005) study on the effectiveness of role-plays as a means of developing pragmatic competence. Although Bardovi-Harlig and Griffin' (2005) study reported that role-plays have great advantages to empower learners in interactions and improve pragmatic awareness, they did not compare role-plays with any other interventional methods. On the other hand, the results of our study did not demonstrate the supremacy of role-plays over metapragmatic and form-search in developing pragmatic comprehension. The contradictory findings can be explained on the grounds that learners in metapragmatic group were provided with more explicit explanations on the key elements of pragmalinguistics and sociopragmatics, explicit information on the pragmalinguistic forms of L2 requests, apologies, and

refusals, and the appropriate use of L2 requests, apologies, and refusals, e.g., issues of social distance, power and imposition, the speaker's intention, etc.. Alternatively, learners in form-search group were provided with necessary vocabulary and phrases, grammatical structures, strategies for a speech act, and choice and use of pragmatic tone. More precisely, the fact that learners in metapragmatic and form-search groups had a better performance than role-play group can be legitimized on the grounds that those sociopragmatic and pragmalinguistic features in the video vignettes were noticed and brought to the metapragmatic and form-search learners' attention more than the learner's attention in role-play group, lending support to Schmidt's (1993) noticing hypothesis and Sharwood Smith's (1980) consciousness-raising.

Analogous to the studies investigating the effects of video-vignettes on the pragmatic development, Jernigan (2012) for instance, investigated the effectiveness of an output-focused instructional treatment featuring video vignettes in an intensive English program setting. The results of her study support the previous research on the effectiveness of instruction on pragmatic development of learners' performance on the perception-oriented pragmatic acceptability judgment test. However, the results of the written DCT pinpointing learners' ability to express acceptable pragmalinguistic forms were less clear. Although a relatively large effect size was observed for the group receiving the output instruction, no significant effects were identified. In line with Jernigan's perception-oriented acceptability test, the present research lends support to the previously done bodies of research on the amenability of pragmatic instruction.

The results of the present study are also supported by Alcón-Soler's (2005) study on the effectiveness of video-instruction on the development of requests. While Alcón-Soler focuses on the commonly dichotomous intervention, that is, explicit and implicit, the present study takes advantage of different teaching approaches. But, the findings of both studies lend support to the fact that learners' pragmatic competence developed. In relation to the effect of explicit versus implicit instructional approaches on learners' awareness of request, Alcón-Soler (2005) found that the explicit group outperformed the implicit group, the results of which contradict Kubota's (cited in Alcón-Soler, 2005, p. 427) study reporting that implicit group outperformed the explicit group. In line with Alcón-Soler's (2005) study, in our study the metapragmatic group outperformed the other groups. One explanation for this difference could be that the metapragmatic group received explicit instruction on the pragmalinguistic forms of L2 requests, apologies, and refusals, and discussed the appropriate use of L2 requests, apologies, and refusals, e.g., issues of social distance, power and imposition, the speaker's intention, etc.

In line with research opting dichotomous teaching approaches such as the ones undertaken by Alcón-Soler's (2005), Rose and Ng (2001), Takahashi (2001), our study reveals that an improvement in pragmatics comprehension occurred in all groups but the metapragmatic group had an advantage over the form-search, role-play, and control groups. The superiority of metapragmatic group over the other groups can also be legitimized with reference to Leech (1983) and Takimoto (2007, cited in Kargar *et al.*, p. 71) pointing out that teaching pragmatics should encompass raising learners' awareness on the

relationship between forms and meanings, forms and strategies for realizing speech intentions and social conditions for the use of the target structures. Gass (1988 cited in Kargar *et al.*, p. 71) states that mere presentation of explicit and implicit language information does not guarantee the learners' success to convert input to output. Likewise, the form-search group outperformed the role-play group. Following Takahashi (2005), this difference could be explained by the fact that learners in the form-search group received explicit instruction on the vocabulary and phrases, strategies for speech acts, and choice and use of pragmatic tone.

### **Conclusion and implications of the findings for EFL/ESL contexts**

Teaching pragmatics sounds complex and challenging, as pragmatic behavior changes to a large extent depending on the sociocultural contexts (Kondo, 2008). However, the results document that all three groups developed their interlanguage pragmatics and became cognizant of pragmatic similarities and differences between their native language and the target language. Since videos can simulate real life situations, authenticate real life situations and bring the closest approximation of real life situations to the classroom environment, they raised awareness concerning various pragmatic aspects involved in the speech acts of apology, request, and refusal. Secondly, the paper sought to find out which group- metapragmatic, form-search, or role play- performed better. The results indicated that the metapragmatic group outperformed the other two in gaining more pragmatic knowledge lending support to other studies done. Moreover, it was found that form-search group had a better performance than role-play group.

Providing learners with rich and contextually appropriate input has been considered as a necessary condition to enhance learners' pragmatic ability when understanding and performing speech acts in the target language (Bardovi-Harlig, 2002; Kasper, 2001; Kasper & Roever, 2002; Rose, 2005). Therefore, the context in which a language is learned seems to play an indispensable role in terms of both the quantity and quality of input to which learners are exposed (Wahburn, 2001). Learners in the second language community have more opportunities to come into contact with the target language, so exposure to it can improve their pragmatic ability. Conversely, learners in a foreign language context are in a disadvantageous environment, since they depend exclusively on the input that arises in the classroom (Kasper & Roever, 2002). Rose (1999) emphasizes that large classes, limited contact hours, and little opportunity for intercultural communication are some of the features of the English as a foreign language (EFL) context that impede pragmatic learning. Moreover, Washburn (2001) states that "the materials developed explicitly for teaching pragmatic language use are basically impoverished in terms of the characters, their relationships and motivations, and even the language" (p. 24). Regarding the necessity of contextualized input in EFL settings and alleviating some of the inherent restrictions of EFL contexts, this study has several implications for EFL/ESL contexts. The significant impact of consciousness-raising video-driven prompts on the development of apology, request, and refusal indicated that pragmatics is amenable to teaching.

Due to the lack of adequate materials and training and a lack of emphasis on pragmatic issues in EFL courses, the pedagogical implication then for teachers is to make

students recognize the importance of the pragmalinguistic and sociopragmatic features which is replete throughout the language learning. This can be accomplished by providing learners with extended opportunities to receive contextualized, pragmatically appropriate input. As an extracurricular activity, teachers can ask their students to analyze movies from a pragmatic vantage point. When teaching different speech acts, teachers can highlight those parts in the movies leading to more pragmatic awareness, comprehension, and production. Teachers can also bring to the fore those conventional expressions used in video-prompts and ask learners to compare the conventional expressions cross-linguistically with their L1s. Such an activity could raise learners' awareness of conventionality. Teachers need to know that scenes from movies, dramas, or plays often serve as a rich source of pragmatic input because they contain a variety of conversational exchanges in which the speaker's reply does not provide a straightforward answer to the question.

In terms of pedagogy and curriculum development, the results are suggestive of the fact that there is a strong need to improve ILP abilities on the part of the learners and that the inclusion of pragmatics materials especially video-driven clips in curricula and learning materials is beneficial. Language materials developers should incorporate a variety of real life activities and learning tasks with regard to different speech acts. However, care should be taken to generalize our results to other instructed foreign language learning environments.

Although the present study contributes to the literature on pragmatic development and pedagogy, the findings could have been enhanced if written discourse completion test had been utilized along with MCDT to

let participants produce the speech acts of apology, request, and refusal. Our analysis did not account for dichotomous teaching approaches on the pragmatic development, nor did it take into account the *production* of speech acts. Further studies are needed to investigate the abovementioned issues. Additionally, since the effect of different interventional treatments depends highly on learners' individual variables, such as motivation, age, and language proficiency level, as well as the kind of input, and length of stay, further studies are required to find out the effect of all these variables. It should also be born in mind that a delayed posttest would yield noteworthy results.

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**Appendix A**

**George:** Hi. I'm your new neighbor, George Rivera. I live next door.

**Stephanie:** Oh, hi. I'm Stephanie Lee.

**George:** So, you just moved in? Do you need anything?

**Stephanie:** Not right now. But thanks.

**George:** Well, let me know if you do. Um, by the way, would you mind turning your stereo down? The walls are really thin. So the sound goes right through to my apartment.

**Stephanie:** *Oh, I'm sorry! I didn't realize that. I'll make sure to keep the volume down.* Oh, by the way, is there a good Italian restaurant in the neighborhood?

**George:** Yeah, There's a great one a couple of blocks from here. Try their lasagna. It's delicious!

**1. Level of social status between Stephanie & George**

1  lower    2  equal    3  higher

**2. Level of relationship between Stephanie & George**

1  close    2  moderate    3  distant

**3. Severity of Stephanie's apology**

1  low    2  moderate    3  high

1 inappropriate    2 less appropriate  
3 somewhat appropriate    4 very appropriate

**4. Level of formality and politeness**

1     2     3     4

**5. Strategies of apologies**

1     2     3     4

**6. Vocabulary and phrases**

1     2     3     4

**7. Pragmatic tone**

1     2     3     4

**8. How does Stephanie apologize?**

- a) She avoids taking responsibility for it.
- b) She makes up for it by buying lasagna.
- c) She shifts the blame to someone else.
- d) She admits making a mistake.

